



**Llunio Lleuedd**  
ar gyfer Llesiant yng Nghymru  
**Shaping Places**  
for Well-being in Wales

## Design phase

# Systems approaches and local authority partnership action to influence the wider determinants of health

Case study report

August 2023



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## Introduction

The case studies presented in this document will be used to produce part of a proposal to the Health Foundation for a establishing a national systems resource to enable Public Services Boards in Wales to use a systems approach to support action on the Wider Determinants of Health identified in their Well-being Plans. Information from the case studies will inform the development of the full proposal for a multi-year award from the Health Foundation's Shaping Places grant funding.

Cases were collected between January and April 2023. The main aim of the case studies is to provide examples from across Wales and the UK of where complex systems approaches have been used to influence the wider determinants of health in the context of local authority and public health partnerships. As such, all case studies include a background section explaining the public health issue being addressed, before focusing on why a systems approach was chosen and what aspects of a systems approach were implemented and how this was done. Finally, each case study includes a section focussing on enablers and barriers of taking a systems approach as well as any lessons learned from the process. Systems approaches within this context involve the application of systems thinking and associated methods and tools (e.g. systems mapping, identification of leverage points), aspects of systems leadership including coalition building and skills for collaboration and frameworks and methods for systems change and evaluation.

A case study is a 'type of qualitative research in which in-depth data are gathered relative to a single individual, program, or event for the purpose of learning more about an unknown or poorly understood situation' (p.45).<sup>1</sup> Case studies are a widely used methodological approach which allows for in-depth, multi-faceted exploration of complex issues in their real-life settings.<sup>2</sup>

For this project, an instrumental/collective case study approach was undertaken.<sup>2</sup> The cases seek to describe and explain the how, what and why of the intervention of interest. A case was defined as a local authority multi-agency partnership which has adopted a systems approach to working together to influence or implement action on one or more of the wider determinants of health.

See method document for more information about the approach, scope and method, selection process and recruitment and data collection.






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<sup>1</sup> Leedy, P., Ormond, J., 2005. Practical Research: Planning and Design. Prentice Hall Upper Saddle River, NJ

<sup>2</sup> Crowe S, Cresswell K, Robertson A, Huby G, Avery A, Sheikh A. The case study approach. BMC Medical Research Methodology 2011; 11(100)

## Key to systems tools and methods referenced in the case studies

The case studies highlight tools and methods and ways of working which are commonly used as part of taking a systems approach.

	Stakeholder mapping – a tool used to identify those with a stake in the issue; understand where the power and influence might come from; and learn more about the perspectives of stakeholders.
	Systems leadership – leadership which involves working across organisational boundaries with others to understand and manage a complex issues.
	Systems mapping – a range of tools used to describe and explore the multiple factors and the relationships between factors in a defined system.
	Theory of change – a detailed description and illustration of how and why a desired change will occur within a specific context. It often contains inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and assumptions.
	Whole system approach – an approach that considers the multifactorial drivers of an issue, involves transformative change with co-ordinated action across a broad range of stakeholders, and operates across all levels of governance.

## Case Study One: Wrexham Glyndwr University (WGU) North Wales Public Service Lab



### What?

Wrexham Glyndwr University (WGU) is working together with partners across North Wales to end social inequality in the region by 2030.

This commitment is part of WGU's Civic Mission Partnership Strategy, which has been co-created with hundreds of partners working to deliver public services in North Wales and identifies where and how WGU can be most useful in achieving the collective mission.

The work to end social inequality is focused on enabling innovation, co-creation and testing and delivering new approaches around three priorities:

1. Leadership, governance and whole system working
2. Building community resilience
3. Keeping well

As part of the civic mission work, in 2020 WGU established the North Wales Public Service Lab (NWPSL) with partners as a learning and doing space for all leaders to come together, to share challenges, co-produce solutions and develop systems leadership knowledge and understanding. As part of this work and as a lead partner with North Wales Public Services Board (PSB) the North Wales Insight Partnership was established, it is made up of a wide range of organisations including:

- Local authorities
- Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board
- Public Health Wales
- North Wales Fire and Rescue
- Natural Resources Wales
- The 2025 Movement
- The Co-Production Network for Wales

The partnership aims to support and enhance the work of PSB across the region particularly around the well-being assessments and well-being planning.

## Why was a systems approach chosen?

The Insight Partnership aims to drive a whole systems approach to working with communities using data and insight in new ways to capture and share learning and expertise. Building on WGU's work over the last five years to enable hundreds of systems leaders across North Wales, the NWPSL has been established to maintain and continue to build this community.

Enabled by the Lab, the Insight Partnership's focus is to work collaboratively to develop regional learning and innovation around the three key areas of research, engagement and systems change and maximise resources for local delivery and regional understanding. A place where PSB, their partners, and all those with an interest in the delivery of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act in North Wales can learn, share and innovate together.

## What aspects of systems approaches were implemented and how?

The NWPSL involves developing a programme of events, building capacity and future thinking skills and research outputs around key themes in collaboration with partners. The lab provides a virtual and physical space for leaders and practitioners working in public services to come together to share their challenges and explore collective action.

Through a series of systems leadership masterclasses, café conversations, roundtable discussions and a wide range of other events, the Lab is about helping to achieve the positive change the region needs for the future.

The Insight Partnership has grown organically to respond to the needs of partners and communities, looking long term and aiming to ensure everyone works together across the system to connect root causes and interconnected issues across the 7 well-being goals in the Well-being of Future Generations Act for Wales.

The Partnership aims to share learning, best practice and innovation and to enable existing structures and networks to connect, by developing three communities of practice for Research, Engagement and Systems Change.

The purpose of NWIP is to:

1. CONNECT all those people and organisations with a shared interest in the delivery of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act across North Wales.
2. EQUIP the PSB of North Wales with insight, education and intelligence to enhance the impact of their work.
3. OPTIMISE available resources by bringing coherence to existing networks, reducing duplication and identifying opportunities for collaboration.

Projects that are being developed through the Insight Partnership include:

Creating Llesiant, well-being 'zine' which aimed to bring the wellbeing assessments data to life in a creative way working with WGU graphic design and illustration students.

Engagement with citizens – Including an innovative piece of work to engage citizens in the analysis of data for climate change, being taken forward by WGU and Natural Resources Wales, laying the foundations for a North Wales Citizens Jury, a community narratives project and taking forward work to develop trauma informed organisations and communities through a Trauma and ACE Informed Community of Practice in partnership with ACE Hub Wales.

Through the Insight Partnership, a Regional Engagement Network is also being developed with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, as well as a programme to engage children and young people through a Future Leaders pilot.

### **What were the outcomes and impact?**

The work of the Lab continues to develop and broaden to support the delivery of the skills and knowledge needed across North Wales to enable public services to respond to the big societal challenges affecting the region.

The NWPSL has enabled a wide range of work to be carried forward, with the full establishment of the Insight Partnership and the structure in place with key partners. WGU will continue to build on this as a useful resource to support future thinking and skills/education for the Insight Partnership and its work to develop and deliver innovative wellbeing plans that meet the needs of communities and to continue to develop the ideas and projects that have grown from the establishment of the partnership.

As part of this, the NWPSL will be used as a “knowledge broker” to underpin the work, using a four stage systems thinking model developed by partners to ensure problems/challenges that emerge from the community are matched to ideas, concepts and solutions co-created, including developing future skills programmes.

This will include using the Insight Partnership as a strategic challenge that will be taken through the model, exploring how this work can support the delivery of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act working with the PSB.

The partnership between the NWPSL and the PSB has resulted in the innovative new North Wales Insight partnership (NWIP). The work of the NWIP has enabled the well-being assessments to be more analytical in nature, focussing on interconnections and root causes. They have been framed to assist people and organisations in making sense of and using the data, acting as a bridge between the data and analysis, and action.

### **What were the enablers, barriers and lessons learned?**

#### **Enablers**

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and five ways of working have been key enablers of the approach. Having the driving force of the Civic Mission behind the NWIP and building on the trust and relationships that have been



developed as part of co-creating the Civic Mission in partnership has also played an important role in taking forward a systems approach to this work.

Creating spaces for thinking and learning have been at the heart of the work and adopting the systems leadership principles of starting somewhere and connecting into the system have enabled partners to come together in a neutral, universal space to rally around a clear purpose. Recognising that people own what they create, and through the trusted relationships and strong partnerships that WGU have developed, an important enabler has been creating the space to co-create the approach and work of the Insight Partnership.

## **Barriers**

Sustaining the energy in something that is constantly evolving and changing has been one of the biggest challenges. Also, the recognition that governance can be a barrier. For example, the Insight Partnership is not mandated or owned by any one organisation but has been created knowing there was a need for it through conversations enabled by the NWPSL. WGU recognised that changing mindsets had the potential to be a barrier – so needed to develop an understanding of how to translate from old power to new power to make the approach work. Working in complexity required the crucial need to be brave and bold enough to do things outside of what the system had been telling WGU. This created added time pressures and the need for people and organisations to commit time to have these conversations which continues to add to the challenge but one that all partners involved have embraced.

## Participant quote

“The North Wales Public Service Lab and working with Wrexham Glyndwr University is a really valued and much needed resource for North Wales to enable public services to learn and lead together better to deliver the lasting change our region needs. The systems leadership masterclasses continue to play an important role in our learning and development opportunities at Wrexham County Borough Council.” Michael Cantwell, Wrexham County Borough Council

## Case Study Two: Eyemouth Gateway to Good Health – Obesity Action Scotland



### What?

Eyemouth is part of the Whole System Approach Early Adopter Programme which was established in 2019, by the Scottish Government, to address its ambition to halve childhood obesity by 2030. It is one of eight local authority areas in Scotland chosen as Early Adopters to introduce a local Whole Systems Approach (WSA) to diet and healthy weight. Following established WSA methodologies advocated by Leeds Beckett University and drawing on other systems thinking tools, Eyemouth are working towards changing how local and national stakeholders work together to address the local obesogenic system.

### Why a systems approach?

Child poverty continues to be a concern in Scotland; and this is recognised in Eyemouth. People living in low-income communities are often at risk of experiencing poorer health and are at a higher risk of becoming overweight. Efforts are focused on making Eyemouth a town where residents have access to healthy food and the opportunity to be physically active.

### What aspects of systems approaches were implemented and how?

Conversations relating to promoting action on obesity have been ongoing since before the pandemic; with a focus on facilitating as much community engagement with the process as possible. Partnerships working across organisations such as the East of Scotland partnership, public health consultants, Scottish Borders Council and key stakeholders has allowed for the creation of a working group working towards tackling obesity and promoting physical activity in this Early Adopter Area.

Eyemouth is adopting a whole systems approach to support healthy weight, eating well and being physically active in the community. By mobilising a working group and facilitating three virtual workshops, key actors within the area have developed a shared understanding of the wide-ranging factors contributing to unhealthy diet and weight.

There is a strong reliance on community engagement within this whole system approach, putting the residents of Eyemouth at the heart of change, for better health outcomes in the area.

The working group, led by a Health Improvement Specialist, are striving to embed the nine WSA systems behaviours from Public Health England in their work; strengthening relationships through a formalised governance structure.

43 people attended Eyemouth's first virtual WSA workshop on 31st March 2021, with participants ranging from community members to strategic level council and NHS employees. The session introduced the benefits of WSA, and stakeholders collectively formed an understanding of the complexity of the barriers to diet and healthy weight within their community. Stakeholders co-produced a system map of the many contributing factors that lead to an obesity-promoting environment.

A validation workshop took place so that stakeholders could agree themes of focus for the action plan in this area and these were:

- Communication
- Family participation and learning
- Outdoor activities

In line with these themes, three separate working groups have been set up to drive action in the area:

The family participation and learning group have been improving awareness of health food and are looking to hold community lunches. Building on this, work has been done with a local artist to create a map to promote healthy choice opportunities across the area.

The communication group has begun work on producing an 'Eyemouth living' publication.

The outdoor activities group have been developing a junior parkrun; engaging with local cycling groups; and offering opportunities for the community to socially connect with nature.

The working groups have also used causal mapping to understand points of leverage where outdoor space was not being used, so that they can be transformed and utilised by the community of Eyemouth to further support healthy living across the area.

### **What were the outcomes and impact?**

The three virtual workshops have been validated with a final workshop to sense check the system maps and stakeholder analysis. This has allowed the formulation of key themes as areas of focus for the community of Eyemouth; stimulating actions to be put into practice.

Adopting this approach has ensured that the complex issue of healthy diet and weight within Eyemouth is being looked at from multiple perspectives. Gathering these insights through workshops, and further building on this through system mapping has enabled stakeholders and system actors to understand where efforts should be focused.

In the interest of ripple effects from this project, a key example of the impact that this project has had is that of community cohesion and engagement. For example: the junior parkrun is facilitated by volunteers in the area who have been keen to get involved. The majority of the volunteers are older people, meaning they are

getting out into the community and gaining social connections with younger members of the community but also with each other.

Everyone involved with the parkrun is not only promoting an active and healthy lifestyle but also gaining access to green space, which presents its own health benefits.

### What were the enablers, barriers and lessons learned?

#### Enablers:

- Strong sense of community and community led support (working group embedded within the community, relational understanding of the assets available)
- Supportive governance group
- Community engagement workers – operating as a specialist role, facilitating change

#### Barriers

- The area boasts several local businesses; and the advertising and marketing from some local businesses do not necessarily promote healthy living
- Land use issues for outdoor activities
- Resource and time restriction
- Plans often change when there is a strong element of community planning, which will not always sit with full action plans

## Case Study Three: Greater Manchester's movement for movement: Greater Manchester Moving



### What?

The [Greater Manchester Moving in Action 2021-2031 strategy](#) is Greater Manchester's (GM) strategy for physical activity. It is shaped and powered by GM Moving, GM's 'movement for movement'.

GM Moving includes a growing number and diversity of people and partners. It is locally led, GM enabled and nationally supported, to include strong buy-in and leadership from GMCA and the 10 LAs, GM ICS, GM Active, TfGM, 10 GM (on behalf of GM VCSE organisations), Sport England, and local businesses.

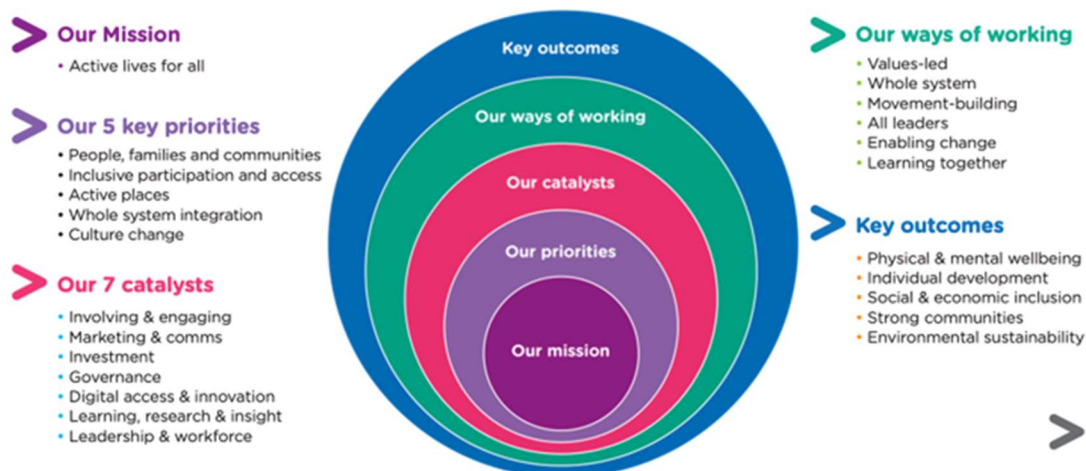
This is a movement of people, communities and organisations, from every sector and place across the city region, with a shared goal of enabling Active Lives for All, aligned behind the knowledge and belief that:

- Moving matters to us all
- We need to design movement back into our lives
- Everyone has a role to play

GM Moving are creating the conditions for active lives for all, making it easier for 2.8 million people to move more everyday as a natural part of how we all live, travel, work and play. For happier, healthier, more connected lives, contributing towards GM's ambition to enable good lives for all, in a greener, fairer and more prosperous Greater Manchester.

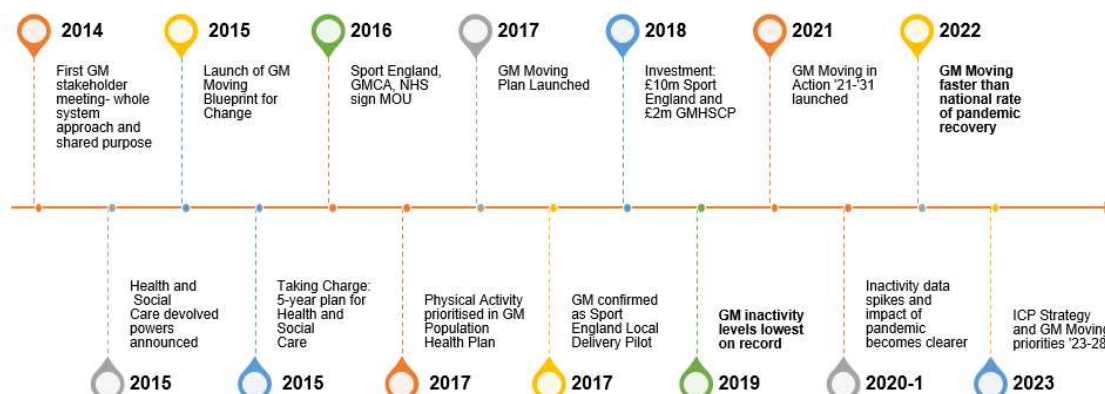
The strategy sets out the framework for achieving this, to include GM Moving's collective commitments, ways of working and whole system approach.

# Strategy Framework



## The journey and partners

### GM Moving Journey



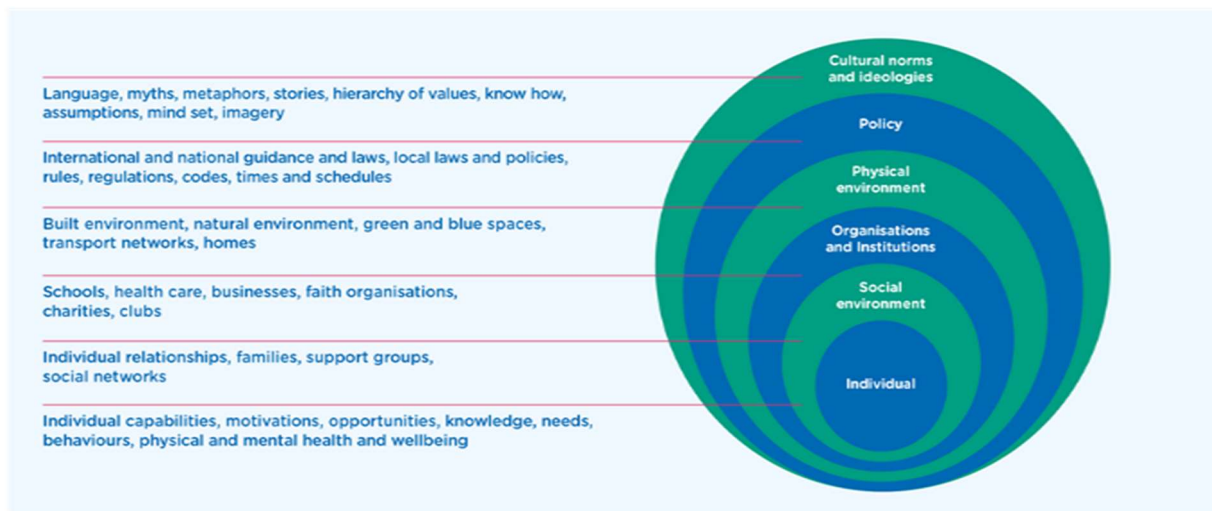
From a small group of people developing the initial GM Moving Blueprint for Change in 2015, to over 2,000 people actively contributing to the latest strategy in 2021, the GM Moving movement continues to grow, broaden and deepen, in numbers, diversity, understanding, courage, clarity and conviction.

### Why was a systems approach chosen?

Population level change requires whole system approaches. GM Moving acknowledge there is no silver bullet to increase activity levels across the whole population. Activity levels are determined by more than individual choice: Telling

people that moving is good for them and encouraging them to move more, is not going to make the change needed. This is why a whole system approach has been taken, working together to align all the key influences on whether someone is active and reducing the inequalities that stand in the way.

The socio-ecological model (below) helps to do that, acting as a guide through the multiple layers that make up the system and influence how much people move.



### What aspects of systems approaches were implemented and how?

Different approaches have been taken to create and shape change within Greater Manchester. One example of this is within health and care integration.

Movement, physical activity, and sport have a critical role to play in reducing health inequalities, contributing to the NHS approach to reducing healthcare inequalities (CORE20 PLUS5). In Autumn 2022, work began in GM on a process evaluation to capture the journey and learning so far in integrating physical activity in health and care systems. The evaluation methodology, including desk research, in-depth interviews, stakeholder engagement and workshops, have enabled the learning from the journey so far to be brought together to inform the 'what' and the 'how' of the next phase of integrating physical activity in health and care.

A series of stakeholder mapping with a range of partners across GM has helped identify and bring together 'spark plugs' across the health system – these are people who have a strong level of belief and a clear influence within the system to steer change within GM and influence physical activity. Identifying and listening to these spark plugs has helped to broaden and strengthen relationships at the same time as deepening understandings of what is going on and what is working and not working. Each spark plug has identified more spark plugs, helping grow a connected network of advocates across the system.

Engagement through the evaluation has helped to:

- Ensure physical activity is embedded into the new Integrated Care Partnership Strategy
- Identify physical activity advocates across the health and care system

- Build new relationships
- Open new doors to embed movement into healthcare pathways.

### Place-based working

The genesis of the place-based approach to GM Moving was the investment from Sport England into Local Pilots. This was a shift from investing in time bound programmes or projects to whole system conversations engaging communities in the design of interventions, tackling the physical or social barriers encountered by residents whilst maximising opportunities to create conditions for increased physical activity and movement.

The approach was built upon key principles of relevant data, authentic person-centred conversations, a strategic willingness to promote and support physical activity, movement and sport and willingness to embrace a learning and evaluative mindset to be able to spot the patterns of change in the ways of working. The approach was based on outcomes and not outputs but there is an acceptance that both data and insight are needed to create compelling narratives to explain the changes and impact within the work.

Through the work and the evaluation framework, the key aspects which are important were identified in accelerating system change.

- Strategic Leadership enabling collaborative leadership
- Involving people and growing assets
- Effective work across and between sectors
- Learning and adapting
- Transforming governance and processes

### What were the outcomes and impact?

Measuring movement in the right direction:

Culture change, system change, and behaviour change can be observed, 'measured' and captured in multiple ways, and it is critical to look at outcomes as well as outputs.

Understanding what makes change happen in complex systems, and whether progress is being made, is critical to take GM Moving forward.

Some things cannot be easily measured but they are equally important to understand; such as the growth of shared purpose, commitment and collective action towards a common goal. Changes in the way the system is operating, the way that people are working, the level of connectivity and collaboration and a growing sense of common purpose and alignment are key enablers of change.

There have been significant milestones and steps forward in this work, captured in the evidence and evaluation.



The ambition and commitments set out in the GM Moving strategy are underpinned by more detailed action plans setting out key steps forward for each priority area. Different system partners commonly have their own action plans and different measures and indicators of change and success. We are also working as a system to develop some shared signposts / milestones for us to collectively sense check, measure progress against and re-orient around.

Working with an independent evaluation team, GM Moving partners are successfully developing a sophisticated approach to evaluation and learning including new ways to codify, operationalise and measure change in a complex system.

Using a critical realist approach to the evaluation, which seeks to understand what works for whom in what circumstances and provides an alternative lens to traditional evaluation techniques. It has highlighted the importance of mind-sets, cultural norms, laws, governance and processes when making system change.

The outcomes from the evaluation, show the progress of using a systems approach, and home in on the importance of qualitative indicators and stories to complement the statistics to show the richer picture of the programme.

A softer measure that has been highlighted in this process, is that of the relationship building and trust that has the potential to have better impact on physical activity within the Greater Manchester. By building on these relationships, systems thinking principles can be embedding within projects and programmes, creating the conditions for longevity.

The stakeholder mapping has been independently evaluated by team of systems experts who look at the levers of system change and has helped GM Moving to understand where the points of leverage are.

### **What difference has adopting a systems approach made (Impact)?**

Sport England's Active Lives bi-annual survey shows progress in terms of activity levels in GM. Whilst this cannot be attributed to the whole systems approach, it does suggest that there is something about the approach in GM that is working.

Prior to the Covid pandemic these data showed an increase in activity levels in GM 2.5 times higher than the national average and inequality gaps were closing across socio-economic and demographic groups. Whilst activity levels were harder hit by the pandemic in GM than nationally, activity levels for both adults and children and young people are now recovering at a faster rate.

Approximately 30% of the GM population are still not experiencing the health benefits of physical activity and the patterns in the data reflect the social determinants of health and point to a need for culture, systems and behaviour change.

We are also seeing and hearing signs that this approach is helping to contribute towards a greater system maturity, for example:

- Greater breadth, depth and diversity of relationships and cross-sector working. Breaking down barriers which stand in the way of progress, not just

for the physical activity agenda, but for other complex and knotty challenges the system is facing.

- Stronger relationships and trust between formal structures and informal networks and communities
- Greater understanding of people, communities and the inequalities and barriers

### **Have there been any unintended outcomes of adopting a complex systems approach? Costs?**

Working with uncertainty and without traditional KPIs and measures of progress and impact can be very challenging for people at an individual, organisational and systemic level. There is a constant need to create space and support for people to get comfortable with this approach and to test, adapt and embed different ways of noticing, gathering, sense-checking and measuring change.

### **What were the enablers, barriers and lessons learned?**

#### **Enablers**

The following enablers are key to creating the conditions needed across the system for more active lives:

- Involving local people and growing assets
- Strategic leadership enabling collective leadership
- Effective work across and between sectors
- Transforming governance and processes
- Learning and adapting



Alongside these enablers, there needs to be different ways of thinking, bringing in creativity and disrupting the system to create meaningful change. Understanding what makes change happen in complex systems is critical to progress.

GM Moving deliberately develop a learning mindset, encouraging each other to reflect and sense-make together and to adapt and evolve the 'how' to take on board further learning, from experiences and elsewhere. For example, on movement-building, human learning systems and enablers of transformational change.

Ensuring that there is time to reflect on 'what' actions that have taken place, the 'so what' in terms of both visible and invisible outcomes and outputs and the 'what now' is key. Designing in reflection time, time to test and develop different frameworks and processes, and time for regular sense making and storytelling has been a game-changer.

## Barriers

The enablers when reversed are barriers:

- Governance and processes focused on traditional KPI's
- Short term funding and timelines
- Leaders, organisations, partners and sectors are focused on siloed initiatives, projects and programmes rather than working together for shared outcomes.
- Rigid, traditional hierarchies that centralise power, decision-making and agency.

- Egos – individual and organisational
- Lack of individual or organisational commitment, time and space for learning, reflection and development
- Lack of flexibility to learn and adapt as you go – either due to funding restrictions, governances and evaluation demands/expectations, or individual discomfort or inability to work with uncertainty and outside comfort zone.

## Case Study Four: Newham Food Security



### What?

The Newham Food Secure 11-19 project began in autumn 2021. Newham Council and its partners are addressing food insecurity for children and young people (CYP) living in Newham by implementing a community-based system dynamics approach. This is part of the Shaping Places for Healthier Lives Programme.

The project has been funded by the Health Foundation and supported by the Local Government Association. A team was established to review and extend the existing strategies and interventions addressing CYP's food security in Newham.

The project aims to better understand the determinants and solutions of addressing food insecurity for CYP in Newham in order to help maximise positive health outcomes for residents, now and in later life. The project is focused on 11–19-year-olds due to the importance of adolescence in determining health and wellbeing outcomes as they take more control over their own health and wellbeing.

Food security was identified as a priority in the Newham Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. 51.8% of Newham's 60,000 CYP are living in poverty, and 17,154 were eligible for free school meals in 2019.

The vision is to embed systems-thinking into decision making to allow Newham to identify a cohesive, system-wide package of sustainable interventions to improve the outcomes of residents.

### Why was a systems approach chosen?

Complex system mapping has been used as a key aspect of the project, focusing on the complex interaction between the settings where young people live, learn, socialise and play, and food security.

System mapping was selected to support Newham to identify where structural barriers lie, key areas of intervention and new levers to address food security.

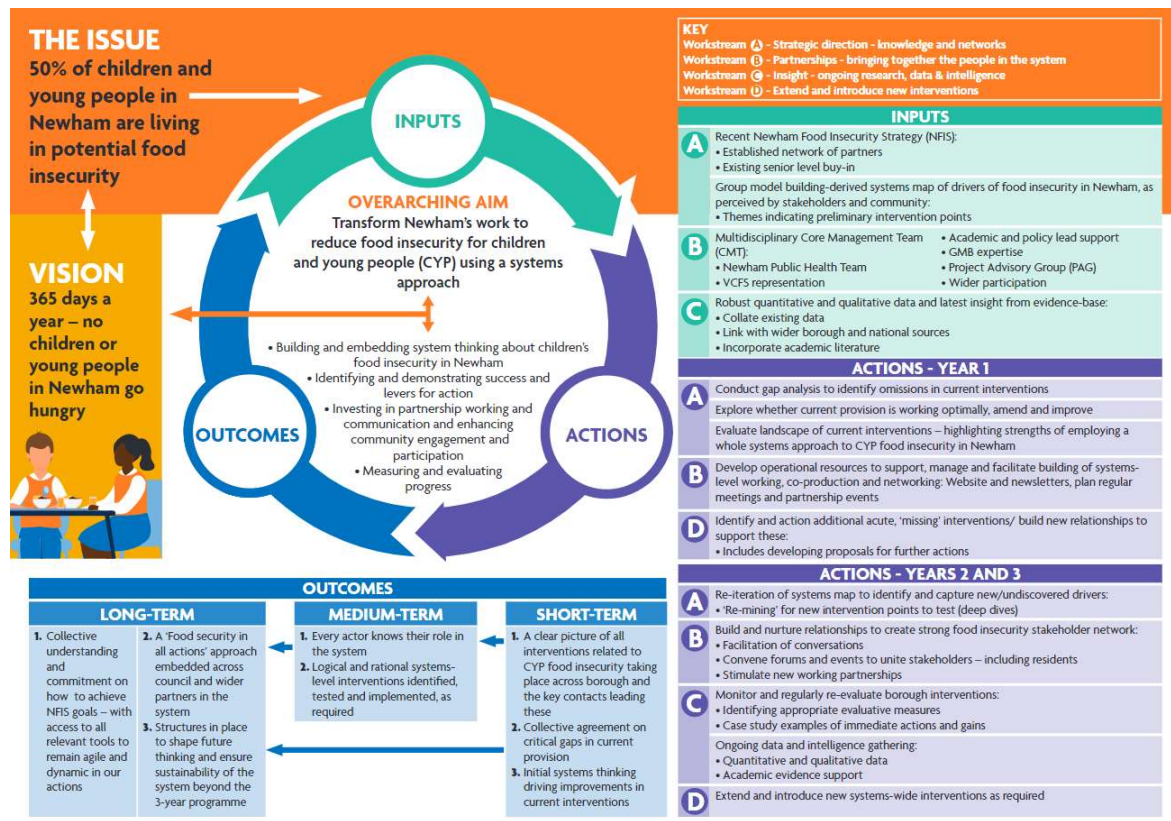
Complex system mapping and building networks of committed stakeholders to find innovative, new "levers for action" have been key components of the project. This has been enabled through cross-organisational working, including the Association for Young People's Health, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Council's Public Health department.

### What aspects of systems approaches were implemented and how?

Mechanisms such as system mapping and a theory of change, working across organisational boundaries and engaging with local communities have been used to further understand how to address food security in Newham.

## Theory of Change

The theory of change has provided a “touchstone over time” to understand the activities taking place within Newham to address food security and helping to inform funding allocations and prioritise interventions that maximise health outcomes for CYP.



## System Map

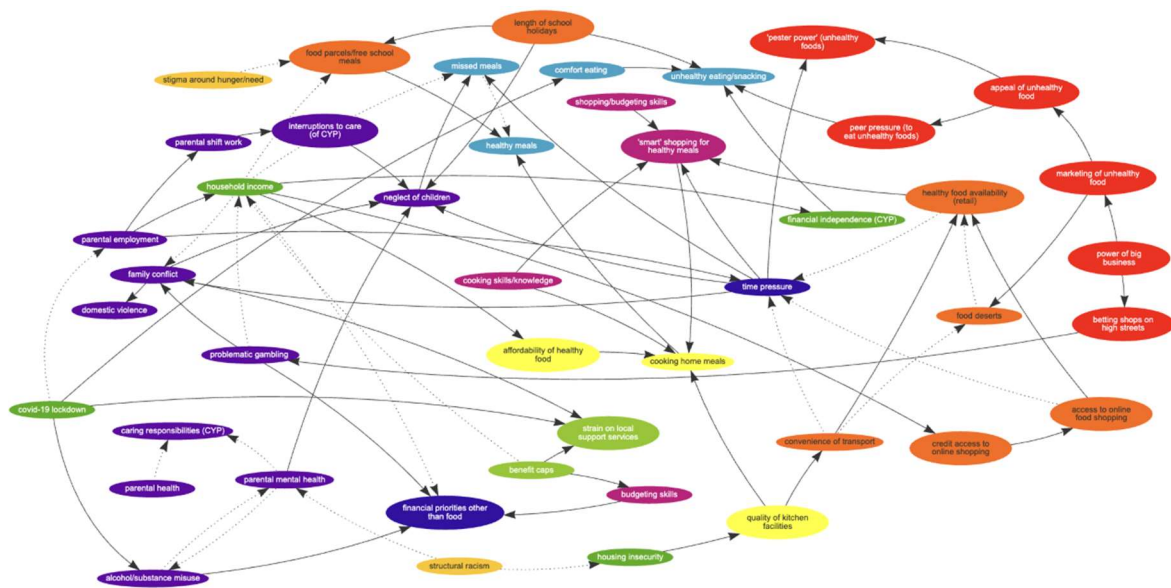
Ensuring Newham has a better understanding of all the existing interventions relating to CYP food security in the borough was one of the outcomes of the theory of change model. To enable this, the drivers of food insecurity were mapped across Newham using a system mapping approach.

The system map demonstrates that addressing the issue requires a system-level approach given the complexities and interacting factors involved.

Stakeholders noted that it would not be possible to rely solely on commonly used individual-level behaviour change techniques to address food security. Instead, these interventions needed to be complemented by whole-systems thinking and system-level interventions.

As part of Newham's active approach to learning, the best places to intervene in the system for addressing food security were been looked at. The aims were to

ensure the system map evolves over time, using the deepening connections across the Newham.



“We will be aiming to create a network of connected people so that we can keep up to date with developments”. Newham workshop observation.

The project has provided an opportunity to bring different perspectives together to build a clearer picture of the overlapping complexities of food security in CYP.

### What were the outcomes and impact?

Since the beginning of the Newham Food Secure 11-19 project in 2021, Newham has been recognised as one of London’s leading councils on food security, receiving high rankings in the ‘Beyond the Food Bank’ report and the ‘Good Food for All Londoners’ report.

Through the whole systems approach and partnership, the systems map has helped understand the context and wider environmental factors influencing food insecurity, moving away from individual based public health interventions such as food labels on packaging. The systems map has led to acknowledgement of the levels of poverty in Newham, the complexity of food insecurity, and has also highlighted the high rates of households in temporary accommodation. In this vein, the whole systems approach has helped uncover new areas of intervention to address food insecurity.

Bringing together stakeholders from different parts of the systems map was also noted as beneficial in seeing the issue from different angles.

“The process of meeting other people who are doing system mapping and making connections is really useful.” Newham workshop observation.

The next steps for the systems-map include deep diving into ‘sub-systems’ of the map that could be enriched further, including secondary schools and out-of-school environments.



Taking a systems approach has involved understanding the role communities play in addressing food security. Newham recognises that young people and the wider community should be involved in the process of tackling food security. As a result, engagement work has begun, with further engagement work being planned to identify and implement interventions that will maximise health outcomes for CYP in Newham.

The findings so far suggest understanding of the local system has improved. Through taking a whole-systems approach and working in partnership, different perspectives coming together from across the borough have allowed Newham to see food security from new angles. This has helped identify new opportunities that can be leveraged to develop interventions.

**To build on the progress made in its first year, the Project aims to achieve the following during the next two years of funding:**

- Build a new network of all Newham initiatives and partners relevant for young people's food insecurity.
- Work with this network to map the drivers and influences on young people in the borough, particularly during the secondary school years, and embed this kind of system thinking in Newham's public health work.
- Help people see this through the eyes of 11–19-year-olds, so that they can spot gaps and innovative approaches.
- Identify success and levers for action – pinpointing where there may be potential for new interventions that bring maximum return, and exploring why some existing interventions may fail.
- Work together to co-deliver new, sustainable programmes for Newham for the next few years.

## **What were the enablers, barriers and lessons learned?**

### **Enablers**

Stakeholders have identified a number of strengths in the design and delivery of the project. These strengths are positively shaping how food insecurity is addressed in the borough. These include:

- Having a strong existing network and connections to build upon
- The high political salience of food poverty in Newham
- The importance of engaged and effective leaders
- Having systems-mapping expertise.

### **Barriers**

Delivery leads have highlighted the need to overcome certain challenges to fully realise the opportunity of addressing food security within this project. These include:

- Capacity constraints



- Staff changes
- Post-Covid connectivity
- Cross-organisational information sharing
- Creating a discrete project identity
- Identifying CYP who are food insecure using anonymised process.

## **Lessons Learned**

Taken from the Interim report, some key lessons have emerged from applying a complex system change approach so far. These include:

- Investing time in understanding and building connections has unlocked new potential solutions for addressing food security
- Effective and engaged leaders have been critical to driving systems-led thinking in a ground up approach
- Actively engaging with people on the ground has helped better understand individuals' experiences of food security

## **Participant quotes**

"We expected embedding complex systems thinking to take more resource and a longer time to get people on board with systems-thinking, but it has happened in the first year." Newham internal client meeting observation.

"The project has achieved a number of targets already. In terms of building networks, embedding system thinking, and bringing a particular focus on 11–19-year-olds, work has progressed well. The public health team has broadened use of complex system mapping methods to several other related topics (including healthy weight), in work that extends beyond what was originally funded in our project. There is clearly an appetite to learn more about this as an issue and consider some new and innovative ways to help young people in this age group." Newham Quarterly Report, September 2022.

## Case Study Five: Unlocking Social and Economic Innovation Together in Birmingham (USE-IT)



### What?

USE-IT is a 3-year European Union funded programme which aims to pioneer innovative approaches to inclusive urban development in an area of persistent poverty and deprivation in inner city Birmingham.

Partners include:

- Birmingham City Council (lead partner and accountable body)
- University of Birmingham
- Birmingham City University
- Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospital Trust
- Initiative for Social Entrepreneurs
- Birmingham Chambers of Commerce
- Cooperative Futures
- Citizen Coaching
- Brushstrokes
- Karis Neighbour Scheme
- Localise West Midlands
- Health Exchange
- Birmingham Voluntary Sector Council
- Smethwick Church Action Network
- Canal and River Trust

### Why was a systems approach chosen?

The USE-IT project began with the aim of pioneering innovative approaches to combating poverty in a neighbourhood of persistent urban deprivation in West Birmingham and Smethwick. The heart of the USE-IT approach has been the idea of bridging the gap between top-down and bottom-up approaches to create a whole neighbourhood approach to combating poverty.

A core principle of this approach is understanding that more can be done to leverage the physical, financial and human assets of a place for local economic benefit; bridging relationships and creating lasting community change.

### What aspects of systems approaches were implemented and how?

The programme was set up within the context of regeneration, and the concept of trying to understand how to connect the macro and micro assets within a community. Regeneration programmes have previously looked to use 'top-down' strategic decisions and are largely determined by large organisational partnerships. To create change, the USE-IT project mapped out the micro- assets within the West Birmingham community to steer 'bottom-up' decision making.



The project has used a range of methodologies to understand the enormity of the complex change needed to bridge the gap between macro and micro assets in a community space. Working with residents within communities, through the training and implementation of community researchers, has allowed for feedback loops to be created. Mapping exercises of the macro and micro assets in this programme, has helped to understand the connections that need to be made to make real change.

The USE-IT programme has utilised a framework which is used to help understand how systemic change is happening within West Birmingham:



Overview of the framework:

- Providing the link between top-down and bottom-up approaches and between the macro and the micro.
- Delivering specific action rather than broad strategy because through action, trust can be built and partnerships developed.
- Avoiding pre-determined strategic approaches because each neighbourhood is unique so solutions need to be organic and able to respond to unplanned opportunities.

### What were the outcomes and impact?

Birmingham Council endorses the USE-IT approach as an innovative model of community-led regeneration and wealth building.

The programme has been externally evaluated by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) which utilised an [evaluation framework and impact analysis](#). Along with this, DWP commissioned the New Local to conduct an external review of the programme. External evaluators have estimated that the project is forecast to contribute £25 million to the local economy through economic improvements: higher income jobs; increased business income; additional investment and grants to develop local assets.

Some key systems change impacts that have been seen by working in this way are outlined below:

- Outcome 1 – local organisations as anchor institutions – Birmingham University has embraced this role, developing community researcher roles, which has harnessed the assets that exist within the community.

- Outcome 2 – People are better connected to assets – enabling alliance of community groups and organisations.
- Outcome 3 – Individuals are able to create social, economic and environmental change – using community researchers as part of the feedback loop process, enables them to work directly with partners to make change.
- Outcome 4 – Increased recognition amongst developers, local authorities, health sector and high education of community assets.

USE-IT works with what is already there rather than insisting that the solution to the problem (poverty) requires the creation of something new. Adopting this approach within communities, not only allows the gap between macro and micro assets to be bridged, but also facilitates the communication between larger anchor organisations and community-based organisations.

The USE-IT model is now being implemented within East Birmingham where it is hoped that positive systemic change can happen.

### What were the enablers, barriers and lessons learned?

#### Enablers

- Establishing a personal relationship by the core team to liaise with the partners.
- Timely resource management to build capacity.
- Senior official buy-in (leadership buy-in).
- Having partners who are willing and able to be flexible, adaptable and generous with their resources.
- Partners who see and use the programme as an opportunity to make a positive change.

#### Barriers

- Managing a partnership with multiple organisations.
- Lack of capacity in the community; early timely intervention and resource need to develop capacity
- System change based on the evidence of USE-IT.

#### Lessons Learned:

- Assets already exist, top-down; bottom-up; macro and micro – they just need to be bridged together.
- Addressing one specific need can produce many outcomes such as unintended success.

- The goal is not outputs, it is culture. When culture change outputs were easy to achieve, the programme exceeded the number of expected outputs across all Work Packages.